

Prapatti as Expounded in Śrīvacanabhūṣaṇam

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Śrīvaiṣṇavism¹ accepts *bhakti* and *prapatti* as *upāya*. *Upāya* is the means to attain *upeya* (end). This *upeya*, or end, is Śrīvaikuṅṭha,² which is 'the supreme abode of Śrīman Narāyaṇ'. Piḷḷai Lokācārya (PL),³ the foremost *ācārya* (religious teacher) of Śrī Rāmānuja⁴ tradition wrote the *Aṣṭādaśa Rahasyā*⁵ which is a compendium of eighteen polemical works. Among these the last, *Śrīvacanabhūṣaṇam* (SVB), is the *magnum opus* in which the theology and philosophy of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, especially *bhakti* (devotion to God) and *prapatti* (self-surrender to God) are discussed elaborately. Maṇavāḷamāmuni (MM),⁶ the follower of PL wrote an extensive commentary upon the text where, for greater clarity, he incorporated his own views along with its original thinking. My purpose here is to critically analyse the *svabhāva* (inner nature) of self, the insufficiency of *bhakti* and the accessibility of *prapatti* to *mukti* (final destination of self). An attempt would also be made to examine their treatment as expounded in the text, in the comprehensive commentary and the various criticisms.

A close look at the *svabhāva* of self is necessary in order to study the main theme of *bhakti* and *prapatti*. Śrīvaiṣṇavism professes that, though the self is eternally united with the Lord, it is *śaṣṭva* (subservient to) and *pāratantriya* (dependent upon) to Him. It has no independent status for its self-protection and emancipation. Instead, it always depends upon the Lord's command. So it is inferred that the self should not have (i) possessiveness which destroys the *svabhāva*, (ii) sense of self-protection which obstructs the *upāya*, and (iii) an attitude of self-purpose which extinguishes the *upeya* (Mummu, 1983:85-6).

The self is metaphorically inferred as a *dāsa* (slave) of the Lord who is the *svāmi* (master) and is thus *śeṣa* (subordinate) to Him. As such, the relation can be identified as *śarīra-śarīri* (body and embodied), *ādeya-ādihāra* (supported and support), *niyanya-niyanta* (controlled and controller) etc., (Ayyangar, 1987:129-35). In its union with the Lord, the self should feel that its spiritual essence is for the sake of the *Śeṣi's* (master's) enjoyment, in which it becomes *svarūpayāthātmya* i.e., an entity to be enjoyed by Him (Mummu 1983:76-86). When the self follows *prapatti*, it should completely surrender itself to the wish of the

Lord, i.e., *paragatasvīkāra* which means that the self should feel that the Lord is the authority to save it. PL states that, 'The cessation of self-effort is an effect of *pāraṅtantriya*, the cessation of self-purpose is a result of *śaṣatva*' (SVB. 72).⁷ Thus, it is clear that the self should surrender itself totally to the Lord and not foster any sense of autonomy. In addition, it should not try to follow any *sādhana* (means to achieve a goal) with *svagatasvīkāra*, (acceptance of the Lord as protector) with self responsibility.

According to Śrīvaiṣṇavism, when the self tries to attain emancipation, it should contemplate upon the Lordly qualities. The way of meditating upon Him would be the *upāya* or *siddhopāya*, which is already fulfilled *upāya* and which is always accompanied by the self's existence. The root of *siddhopāya* is nothing but the *antariyāmī brahman*; the belief that the Lord exists within the essence of the self. To attain freedom, the self has to concentrate upon the inner essence. It is *siddhopāya* which finally grants redemption, where selfhood transforms into Godhood.

Śrīvaiṣṇavism argues that, *bhakti* is for the person who has knowledge of the scriptures, the ability to worship and meditate properly and to perform sacrifices. In *bhakti*, if there is any mistake or omission and if proper atonement is not performed, *mukti* will be delayed. *Prapatti*, on the other hand, is open to all regardless of birth and ability and it does not require the person to follow the steps of *bhakti* stated in the scriptures. If the individual performs *prapatti* once in his lifetime, liberation is certain. Moreover, *prapatti* seems to be more practicable, because the self is *akiñcana* (helpless and destitute); *ananyabhogatva* (with no delight except to enjoy the bliss of the Lord) and *ananyagatitva* (with none to depend upon but Him).

By considering the *svabhāva* of the self as desideratum, concerning *bhakti* and *prapatti*, SVB critically evaluates the nature of *bhakti* and then by asserting proper reasons, the text rejects it. So, to substantiate the view, it would be desirable to systematically identify the demerits and the inconsistencies of *bhakti yoga*. By way of argument, PL avers that, *bhakti* is not suitable to the *svabhāva* of the self: 'it is *upāya* of the ignorant' (SVB. 120).⁸ Here the 'ignorant' means the devotee who does not have the knowledge of the self. The implication is that if one has proper knowledge of the self, then one would not prefer *bhakti*. To make the idea clearer, he remarks that, though the self has supreme knowledge, this knowledge is of lesser importance than the self's subservience and servitude to the Lord. MM through his commentary explains the view that *jñānānanda* (knowledge and bliss) of the self refers to only its *taṣastha* (superficial characters) but *pāraṅtantriya* and

dāśya are its *antarankanirūpaka* (internal description) (Naidu, 1970: 178-81). So an aspirant with knowledge, but without subservience and dependence upon the Lord can be identified as ignorant.

PL maintains that though the devotee is intelligent *bhakti* has a dangerous effect on the self. He states that, 'to the *jñāni* (it gives) danger' (SVB. 121).⁹ The word *jñāni* refers to the devotee who knows the nature of the self. So PL affirms that *bhakti* performed out of self-effort destroys the self's *pāratantriya* which is mendacious to its *svabhāva*.

A true aspirant will not follow *bhakti* because at one stage, it would push him into a state of confusion. While explaining the nature of *bhakti*, MM refers to Nammālvār.¹⁰

nerikāṭṭi nīkkutiyo (Pēriya Tirivantāti)

by showing the ways (you are) avoiding (my self)

While the terms 'ways' means the *upāyas* of *jñāna*, *karma*, *bhakti*, etc., 'avoiding' points out that the Lord diverts the attention of the individual by advising him to follow the other *upāyas* with effort. Since Nammālvār knows the inconsistency of the other *upāyas* he requests the Lord not to advise these *upāyas* because they will drag him away from His abode. It means that he requests Him to advise the observance of *prapatti* only.

PL, by referring to Arjuna's suffering in the battle-field, explains the demerits of *bhakti*:

Because of the word, *varttate me mahatpayam* (to me a great fear continues), it creates fear (to myself because in future danger will arise to myself); because of the word, '*māsucaḥ*' (don't despair), it creates sorrow (to myself) so that I am thinking about the inconsistency of other *upāyas* (SVB. 124).¹¹

MM interprets PL's view through a discussion of the context of the various *upāyas* and their relative merits and demerits. But Arjuna is confused by thoughts about the disadvantages of time, place and impediments of body. Feeling helpless because of such confusion, Arjuna finally surrenders at the feet of the Lord. In response to this and in order to pacify him, Lord Kṛṣṇa recommends *prapatti*.

aḥam tvā sarvāpāpebhyo mokṣyīṣyāmi māsucaḥ (Bhagavad Gītā - 18:66)

I will release you from all sins, do not despair

Arjuna obeys the Lord and succeeds in resolving the problem posed by the critical situation that he faces.

Since *bhakti* stimulates egoistic tendencies in the devotee, it is not an advisable path to follow. *Viṣṇu Purāṇam* states that:

ātmā jñānamaya: amala (VP. 6:7:22)

self is knowledge without defects

Based on the above statement, the demerits of *bhakti* can be analysed. *SVB* professes that if knowledge is affected even slightly by egoism, the self would not follow the proper *upāya*. *Bhakti* accompanied by pure knowledge is acceptable, but it so happens that *bhakti* is always tinged with egoism. *PL*, therefore, affirms that, '*bhakti* mixed with egoism is like a golden pot of pure water mixed with a drop of liquor' (*SVB. 126*).¹² Because of the admixture of egoism with *bhakti*, its practice is likely to be non-conducive to self-realization, which finally adds demerits to the self. This situation is comparable to that of a glass of pure water into which is poured a drop of liquor.

Though, in principle, pure *bhakti* is possible to observe, it cannot retain its standard because in it the *upāya* does not have the same value as that of the *upeya*. Here *PL* specifies, 'Like ruby for cowry, like kingdom for lemon, benefit (*upāya*) is not equalized (to *upeya*)' (*SVB.127*).¹³ *MM* points to a situation where, though a ruby is more valuable than a cowry, in some remote island people usually exchanged it for a cowry because they are usually unaware of the value of the ruby and wore only cowries as ornaments. Similarly an individual, as a token of respect, may in humility approach a king with a lemon. To reciprocate the individual's respect, the king may generously grant his whole kingdom to the person who presents the lemon. In such a situation, the giver of either the cowry or the lemon, are not offering a thing that is of equal value to the ruby or the kingdom. So *MM*, with these illustrations, clearly explains that though the Lord grants the final *puruṣārtha*, the *mokṣa* in response to *bhakti*, the *upāya* and *upeya* do not have equal value and cannot be compared with each other.

This criticism further deepens. Even though, in a sense, cowry for ruby and lemon for kingdom are valued as equal exchange, in *bhakti* the devotee has nothing of his own to reciprocate for the Lord's grace. To this, *PL* asserts, 'Since he (self) is impoverished he has nothing which can be given.' (*SVB.128*).¹⁴ *MM* describes the situation by citing *Nammālvār's* hymns from *Tiruvāymōḷli*:

yāne nī; eṇṇuṭaimaiyum nīye (2:2:9)

I am only you and all I have is yours.

annāl nī tanta ākkai (3:2:1)

That day you gave the physical body.

Since the devotee himself, and his possessions belong to God, he as *akiñcana* has only the chance to devote, prostrate and surrender at the holy feet of the Lord (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 9:31).¹⁵ PL further adds that, if the devotee desires to offer something to God with the feeling that he owns it as property, then he could be considered a thief. *SVB* in explaining the truth says:

If one gives in proper way, where one gives what he has given, it is not *upāya*.

If one gives in improper mean, theft is exposed (*SVB*.129).¹⁶

MM describes the fact that if a devotee feels the need to offer something to God,

It seems like secretly stealing the jewel of *Rājamakentiran* (of the idol Śrī Raṅganātha at Śrīraṅgam) and then publicly presenting it (to Him) (Naidu, 1970: 245).¹⁷

MM further clarifies the demerit of *bhakti* through a suitable anecdote where the Lord is assumed as husband and the devotee as His wife. The wife should not think of obtaining anything beneficial from her husband for the sake of her personal pleasure enjoyed with him. PL asserts, 'Like expecting something (by wife) for her personal pleasure with (her) husband (seems) ignoble to both' (*SVB*.130).¹⁸ As such, in *bhakti* if an aspirant wishes to offer something for the sake of the Divine bliss that he enjoys, then it is questionable, because in the relationship intended here between them as *śeṣa-śeṣi* (the master and the loyal) both are eternally dependent upon each other. In reality, however, there is no place for such reciprocation (*SVB*.116).¹⁹

If *bhakti* is not coeval with the *svabhāva* of the self, a proper treatment could be viewed against the *śāstras* which recommend *bhakti* as the proper means. For that, PL provisionally accepts *bhakti*. Through it he conveys the message that *prapatti* as *siddhoḥpāya* mixed within *bhakti* alone paves the way to salvation.

If it be asked why it is enjoyed as an *upāya* in the *Vedāntas*, (we reply:) for those who won't take medicine, people mix it with a substance they like. Similarly, this (*bhakti*) is only enjoyed mixed in *Īśvara* (*SVB*.131,1320).²⁰

By commenting on PL's analogy of the affectionate mother motif,

MM explains that *prapatti* brings the desired result faster than *bhakti*, where he, by expanding the situation, emphasizes the significance of *prapatti*.

Though they are going about seriously ill, young sons will refuse if they are told to take a strong medicine capable of getting rid of their disease quickly. So an affectionate mother will mix that medicine with some substance that they take with pleasure. Similarly, if (the Lord) had initially taught them to employ the *Sidhyopāya* who removes this illness of *samsāra* quickly, after they first cease their own activities, the *cetanas* would not have accepted it, because of their proclivity (*vāsanā*) toward self-effort which has been ongoing since time immemorial. They could not just forsake those souls who have no desire for this; so they simply mixed in the Lord—the *Siddhopāya*—into this *bhakti* which has the form of self-effort which they love, as its *aṅga*. This kind of *bhakti* is enjoined as a *sādhana* to *mokṣa* for them. In the example, the loved substance does not remove the illness. Likewise, in the matter exemplified, it is not *bhakti* but the Lord mixed in with it who is the (real) *upāya*. Hence (the analogy) is appropriate. When taken directly, the medicine gets rid of the disease without delay. When the desired substance is mixed in with it, the effect will be delayed. Thus it is affirmed that in the same way, the Lord delays, in giving the fruit when (He) is mixed with *bhakti*, (Naidu, 1970:246-48) (As quoted in Mummu, 1983:118-19)

PL and MM confirmed that *prapatti* aptly correlates with the *svabhāva*, *pāratantriya* and *svarūpayāthātmyabhāva* and the *paragatasvīkāra* of the self with God because within them there is no trace of the individual's self-effort. They assert that *prapatti* is simple to practice because in it the whole responsibility for the self's emancipation lies not with the devotee but upon the Lord; where the self ought to submit its essence to Him who takes the total responsibility for its phenomenal and noumenal benefits. Furthermore, in the *upāya*, the Lord alone enjoys the ecstasy by initiating, activating, inviting and merging with the self at his divine abode where the self has to obey the divine commands. To elucidate the extensive analysis of the concept along with its criticism, a proper discussion needs to be carried out. To initiate it, PL defines *prapatti* as, 'an effect of knowledge of the self's true nature, it is appropriate to the *svarūpa*, (and) as it is said, 'No need to exert' it is accomplished by cessation; therefore it is easy' (SVB.139).²¹ While commenting upon the exertion of the devotee as PL, MM refers to Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymōli* and explains its meanings.

cirraventa; cintippe amaiyum kaṅṅirkāl (9:1:7)

(Oh! the fellows) no need to exert; think about Him, (the *prapatti* will be) certain.

Here he states that if *prapanna* who is practicing *prapatti* contemplates upon God out of his ineffable desire to earn His bliss, he should be mentally away from the veils of self-protection. The nature of *prapatti* could be summarized as:

bhagavat pravirutti viroti svappravirutti nivirutti prapatti (Naidu, 1970:259)

actions which are enjoyed by the Lord should be performed and the action for the sake of the self would not be discharged is *prapatti*.

A critical analysis of the definition would reveal the part played by God in saving the self. The statement that '*prapatti* needs no responsibility by the self but to the Lord', does not mean that the self need not offer anything to the Lord in response to His grace which hails down upon it. Indeed, in Śrīvaiṣṇavism theology, it is accepted that the Lord obtains pleasure from the self's *pāratantriya*. By accepting this fact, it is understood that, if the individual mentally express his ineffable love for the Lord with a sense of dependency upon Him in order to attain His bliss, God satisfies and takes care of the aspirant's emancipation.

To understand the issue it is important to discuss whether the self should submit something to God or not and if something is to be submitted what should it be. MM comments upon PL's idea and explicates the implied meaning. Lord as *avāptasamastakāmatva* (having full-fledged capacities and possessing all goodness) expects nothing from the self. But the self also should not be idle in front of Him by thinking of its *akiñcara*, i.e. 'not having anything' to offer to Him. Instead, it should submit at least something to the Lord. To throw light on this MM cites one of the hymns from Nammāḷvār's *Tiruviruttam* (95),

yātānum parri nīnkum viratattai

(One) has to follow any means (to get the bliss of Him)

The Ḍvār supplements that, the Lord while showering His grace gets pleasure by looking into the devotee's meagre submission in response to it. Perhaps, since the Lord is all-possessive he may not feel happy on account of the devotee's submission. But due to His

autonomous will there are chances to reject him by looking into his mutual return of His grace. This view of expecting something from the devotee may be derived from the Lord Kṛṣṇa's words,

*pattraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyam yo me bhaktyā prayacchati
tad ahaṁ bhaktyupahṛtam aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ*
(*Bhagavad Gītā* 9:26)

Whosoever offers to me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, that offering of love, of the pure of heart I accept.

So, it is admitted that if the devotee gives something to the Lord with firm faith upon Him and with a deep-rooted feeling that, 'He always keeps the devotee with Him' and 'He is the final authority to save him', the Lord certainly accepts the same.

There is also a criticism against *prapatti* that it has to be performed by the devotee with self-effort. If it is so, it also (as in the case of *bhakti*) destroys the *svabhāva* of the self. But SVB points out that *prapatti* is not an activity performed by the individual's exertion but expressing the volitional aspects of his *perāval*, i.e., *mahāviśvāsa* (indomitable affection upon the Lord to attain His feet which alone makes him follow the *upāya*). So, since *prapatti* depends upon the volitional domain of the intellect, it could not be viewed as an action performed externally by the individual.

According to PL, since *prapatti* itself becomes *upeya*, there is no place to think about the external activities of the *prapanna* while one is following the *upāya*. PL, by exploiting the anecdote, explains the truth that the Lord himself becomes the means (*upāya*, *prāpaka*) as well as the goal of salvation (*upeya*, *prāpya*): 'Like those who show grass and call (a cow) and then give the grass (to the cow), there is no difference here between the fruit and the *sādhana*' (SVB.144).²² MM explains PL's anecdote and clarifies its implication.

People who want to call a cow and give it food will (first) present the grass that it loves as a way to attract it. Then they will give that (same grass) to the cow. Thus there is no difference between the fruit and *sādhana*. In the same way, the one who is endowed with His distinctively excellent virtues first becomes the *upāya* in order to join (the soul) to Himself, and then becomes the goal (*upeya*) forever. Therefore, both the end and the means are the same thing. (Naidu, 1970:265) (As quoted in Mummu, 1983:156).

In this line of thinking, the uniqueness of *prapatti* could be elucidated by explaining the nature of Divine bliss enjoyed by the

individual. As a result the view that the *upāya* is not an activity performed externally by the devotee to attain *upeya* but that both the stages are nothing but a continuum would be explained. The aspirant first enjoys pleasure by performing *upāya* in the form of submitting something to the Lord,

kaikaḷāl ārattōḷutu tōḷutu unṇai (Tiruvāymōḷi, 3:8:4)

by hands (in joining posture) I am prostrating before you (again and again)

Within the submission, the self gradually forgets the time and space concept where 'pleasure' matures into 'ecstasy'. This is nothing but the effect of Divine bliss which is showered upon the individual. This state can be understood through the Tōṇṭaraṭipōṭiālvār's hymn where the saint enjoys the bliss at Śrīraṅgam as being similar to that at Śrīvaikunṭha.

accuvai pēriṇum veṇṭeṇ araiṅkamānakarūlāne (Tirumālai -2)

(Oh ! Lord Raṅganātha! who resides at the beautiful castle of the holy city of Śrīraṅgam) if I get the rapture (out of divine service at Śrīvaikunṭha) I dare not deny it because I always like to stand before you only and enjoy the same divine qualities by looking at your beauties.

So if we take into account the fact that while performing *upāya*, pleasure is transformed into Divine bliss of the state of *upeya*, the two stages are merged into one. There is then no possibility of equating *upāya* and *upeya* to *bhakti*. Moreover, it is deduced that *prapatti* cannot be considered an activity of the *prapanna*; it is only a transformation of the mental attitude towards the blissful state.

If *prapatti* is an activity of aspects of knowledge with the cessation of all efforts, it does not mean that the *prapanna* should not have any qualifications to follow the *upāya*. PL while mentioning the positive attributes to be possessed by the individual says, 'What is needed for attainment is non-obstruction and beseeching.' (*Mumuksuppaṭi*.272).²³ The term 'beseeching' refers to the will or desire to accept the Lord's protection by the *prapanna*. MM commends it by using the words, *rakṣaṇasvīkāra*, *rakṣaṇānumati* and *upayāvaraṇam*. By understanding the usages, the necessary qualifications of the *prapanna* can be identified as: (i) acceptance of the Lord's protection (ii) requisition to the Lord as being the only refuge (iii) believing that the Lord's grace alone is the *upāya* and (iv) having firm faith that the goal is certain and attainable.

The process of surrendering to God has to be examined in order to understand the effortlessness of self. To begin with, the *svabhāva* of the self, as explained by the *viśiṣṭādvaita* system, needs to be understood. It is from here that the possibility of surrender without the *karṭṛtva* (agentship) of the self can be judged. The system expounds that an agentship of action involves knowledge, will and effort. For PL, the self-surrender is an action which involves no effort on the part of the self but the cessation of all effort; where the self possesses only the knowledge and will. The criticism forwarded against this argument is that if *prapatti* is not an action executed by the individual, then it cannot be *sādhana* performed by him. However, if one realizes the *svarūpayāthāmyabhāva* of the self, one can understand that the Lord is an agent; God enjoys the world in which the individual remains merely an agent in His hands.

Though PL rejects the agentship (*karṭṛtva*) of the self, and accepts as *prapatti* as the individual's mental exercise, he asserts that the self itself does not stand as an instrumental cause of the *upāya*, but it is the Lord, in that He needs the self's permission in the form of the latter's acceptance of His protection. While explaining PL's definitions of the words, 'vraja' [think (*buddhipanṇu*) or resolve firmly (*adhyavasāyi*)] and *prepadye* [I take refuge (*parṛukireṇ*) mentally (*manasamāka*)] of *Dvaya mantra*²⁴ and *Caramaśloka*²⁵, MM unfolds the truth in detail.

In the *Parantapaṭi* (Iyenkar, 1987:140-229), he revealed this kind of thinking to a special knowledge (*jñānaviśeṣa*) consisting of firm resolve which transcends the category of what is to be abandoned without being included in the category of *upāya*. Its form is giving permission (*anumati*) to the Lord's protection, upon relinquishing other means. This promotes the Lord's joy and conforms to the *svarūpa*. (Quotation from Mummu, 1983:146-7)

Regarding *prapatti*, it is sometimes observed that since the *upāya* includes physical and mental gestures, it could be considered as a *sādhana* to be performed. But PL and MM with basic reasons assert the *upāya* is performed by the individual, not through external activities, but as an attitude which is purely governed by his mental and volitional domains. In it, because the Lord takes the whole responsibility for the sake of the betterment of the individual, the external expressions of the devotee as prostration' offering flowers at the feet of the Lord, etc., have no final value. PL endorses the opinion and notes that, 'Since He is the *upāya* and these three (word, deed and thought) are not the actual *upāyas*, there is no restriction demanding all these three.' (*Mumukṣuppaṭi*.156).²⁶ Accepting the view, MM points out the

valuelessness and uselessness of the external activities of the individual.

The means for achieving the result is the Lord to whom one resorts. Resorting which occurs in these three ways is not the actual means, even though it may temporarily appear to be the means. Therefore, one's acceptance which consists of firm resolve that the result will be accomplished, is sufficient. There is no restriction that these three are necessary (Quotation from Mummu, 1983:147).

If *prapatti* is mental and volitional, the self's acceptance of the Lord would be the *upāya* to be performed at least within the mental framework of the individual. Responding to the criticism, PL vehemently avers: 'Even acceptance itself has come from Him alone' (*Mumukṣuppaṭi.223*).²⁷ By commending it, MM resolved the contradiction.

'After acceptance, the destruction of *aniṣṭa* and attainment of desire is brought about by (the Lord) alone. In the same way, the very acceptance which precedes it also comes about from Him alone. Therefore it is said that acceptance is not the *upāya* but the effect of the *upāya* (*svikāratukku upāyakāryatvamōḷiya upāyatvamillai*) (Quotation from Mummu, 1983:148).

The fact is confirmed by Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymōli*,
atuvum avana tinṇaruḷe (8:8:3)

MM expands the meaning and endorses that even the cause for the acceptance of the self could be initially kindled by the Lord only.

Kept (this aim) in his mind, in the form of a desire. After his acceptance, by declaring "That, too, is but His sweet grace", the Alvar made it known that this very acceptance came about solely from the Lord's uncaused mercy (*nirhetukakṛpā*). Therefore, we have to take it that acceptance, too, is the fruit of His labour. (Quotation from Mummu, 1983:149).

If the acceptance of the Lord is the effect of the effort of the Lord's grace, then there would be a criticism that the grace would be only for the *prapanna*, not for others. It restricts the Lord's generosity to individuals who have faith in Him. It questions the self-sufficiency of *siddhopāya* because His grace is open to all, even to individuals who hate Him. PL here professes the view that, God's grace is also to them who hate Him and to them who even do not accept His protection he says that, 'One should think that even without this (acceptance) He does the work (of saving the self). Otherwise, the self-sufficiency

(*upāyanairapekṣya*) will not be maintained.' (*Mumukṣuppaṭi*.226,227).²⁸ By acclaiming this MM asserts the novelty of the Lord's grace.

For this acceptance, too, the Lord himself is the one who has done the labour, therefore it is not on account of this (acceptance) that He does the work (of salvation). Even without this, he uplifts the self, and grants the desired (reward). This is the affirmation one must make (Quotation from Mummu, 1983:149).

So, though they focused their attention to endorse the 'acceptance of God's grace by the self as His effort', PL and MM never forget to nullify the criticism which is levelled against the Lord's generosity.

The *prapanna* should not think of *prapatti* as a *sādhana* or that if he is away from activity he would not enjoy Divine bliss as a result of the *upāya*. Instead, the aspirant should follow *prapatti* with the mental attitude that through the means, the Lord alone delights by getting the self from its cyclic bindings of births and deaths. The Lord in response to the faithful observance of the *upāya* showers His grace, and out of it the individual enjoys the bliss. One thing needs to be added. In the *upāya*, if the Lord wishes to grant emancipation to a particular individual, He would not consider whether the aspirant follows *prapatti* or not. Moreover, even though the devotee forgets to think of Him, the Lord by forgetting the devotee's action, may wish to grant salvation. If this be the situation, he will certainly attain *mokṣa*. To this PL says, 'While he (*cetana*) thinks to attain Him (Lord) this *prapatti* (seems to be) not an *upāya*' (*SVB*.146).²⁹ God out of His independent will may come down from his Supreme Abode of *Śrīvaikuṇṭha* to the level of individuals who are not all following *prapatti* and accept them. In other words, if an individual without the acceptance by God, even though he exerts himself through *prapatti*, would not taste Divine bliss. But if the Lord out of His autonomy wishes to save the devotee, the aspirant could easily enjoy the same. Here, instead of the self reaching the abode of *Śrī Nārāyaṇ*, the Lord hails down to the devotee. The spiritual process can be rightly appreciated. PL specifies this: 'While He (Lord) wishes to get him (*cetana*) even the evilness could not stand against it' (*SVB*.147).³⁰

Since the Lord is the omnipotent and the omnipresent, Himalayan wonders would instantly happen without any contradiction as a result of His wish. In this background, though the *prapanna* still has *karmic* forces to be exhausted through cyclic births, if the Lord wishes to grant salvation, He will save the aspirant ignoring his demerits. On the other hand, though an individual follows *prapatti*, without the Lord's wish he certainly fails to attain Him. The *smṛti* rightly points out that,

'If *cetana* wishes to get the Lord, *prapatti* is not the *upāya*; if the Lord wishes to get him, even his evilness could not stand in its way' (Naidu, 1979: 268).³¹

This view could be inferred from one of Tirumāṅkaiālvār's verses where he states that, the Lord while inducting His grace upon the living beings does not differentiate between human beings with respect to their status.

eḷai etalan kīlmahaṇ enṇā tiranki
marravar kiṇṇarūl curantu (*Periya Tirumōḷi*. 5:8:1)

He showers His sweet grace without the feeling of differentiation as poor, high or low.

So SVB, through numerous discussions and by criticizing *bhakti*, sanctions *prapatti* and verifies that *bhakti* could not be easily followed by all irrespective of caste, colour and creed.

Since *prapatti* is directed by the Lord's wish, the *prapanna* who follows it with his own responsibilities gains only demerits. Though the situation is such, he as dependent on God, has no alternative *upāya* against *prapatti* to attain Him. Furthermore, only through *prapatti* does the aspirant have a chance to get redemption and to nullify the demerits acquired through self-effort. If the *prapanna* understands this and if he follows the *upāya* irrespective of consequences, the demerits of the individual, certainly change into merits and that too is out of His mercy. PL points out the truth as, '*prapatti* is the only resort for all the demerits (of the individual) where it is acceptable (*pōruppittal*) (and through the same) as *prāyaścitta*, all the demerits are swallowed' (SVB.150).³² This view is endorsed by the Lord's word in *Śrīpāñcarātram*,

aham asmi aparātānām ālaya: (Naidu, 1970:271)

I am the store-house of all the demerits (of the individual)

The critical situation of the *prapanna* who submits his demerits at the feet of the Lord is well explained by PL with an anecdote.

The wife who was away with somebody because of her misconduct with him, without feeling shame and fear, returned back to her husband and eagerly requests him as, 'you should accept myself' like that only *prapatti* should be performed by him (SVB.151).³³

MM further elucidates that for a long time it happened that a wife lost contact with her husband and lived happily with her beloved. For this, naturally, she should be punished by her husband. But after some

time, due to the situation having no proper resolution, without shame and fear she approached her husband and requested him to accept her without minding her serious and unforgettable faults (Naidu, 1983:271). Finally, the husband accepted her and they lived happily together. Here the Lord is like the husband and the self refers to His wife where the relation between them is eternal. Due to *karmic vāsanā* (the proclivity through the births), the devotee forgets his relation with the Lord but in certain circumstances he understands his eternal binding with him. While realizing his position, he should not feel ashamed of his forgetfulness of the Lord, or fear that for this the Lord, out of His independency, might punish him. Instead, he should surrender completely at the evermerciful feet of the Lord where he would attain emancipation.

If one rightly understands the meaning of *prāyaścitta* (the proper atonement) out of it an important issue related to the definition of *prapatti* would be properly discussed. Śrīvaiṣṇavism, through its reputed *śāstras*, framed the prescribed rules and regulations for the *prāyaścitta* in response to the sins committed by the *prapanna*. Generally, the *prapanna* would not commit sins but due to certain circumstances, knowingly or unknowingly, he may do so. In this case he ought to perform another *prapatti* as *prāyaścitta* to nullify the demerits incurred as a consequence of his errors. If he failed to do so, the Lord would impose a minor punishment on him, but at the end of his present life *mukti* was certain for the devotee. In this context, while performing the *prāyaścitta*, the definition that '*prapatti* should not be performed as *upāya*' would not be taken into account because the aspirant has to perform the act with an effort and intention to earn the goodwill of the Lord. So performing the *prāyaścitta* through *prapatti* adds demerits to the *prapanna*. But if the *prapanna* completely surrenders at the feet of the Lord even for the demerits, He could swallow these demerits through his special quality of *dosabhokyatvam* (delighting out of tasting even the defects of the *prapanna*), or the Lord out of His grace ignores the devotee's demerits and grants the final *puruṣārtha*, the blissful enjoyment of merging with the *anantakoṭikalīyāṇaguṇaṅkaḷ* (the countless divine qualities of Śrīman Nārāyaṇ). So in *prapatti* the devotee should give the sole responsibility to the Lord. In this critical situation, God out of His grace will consider the devotee a destitute and grant him the final *puruṣārtha*. So, inspite of the drastic situation of the self, the complete surrender at the feet of the Lord could be considered as an assured means to liberation.

Instead if the Lord showers His grace in response to the individual's

prapatti, He Himself as *pāratantriya* to the devotee may willingly grant emancipation. To illustrate the issue, PL states:

The grace showered by the Lord who is *pāratantriya* out of His own *svātantriya* (having no binding with any cause and not restricted by anything but depending upon His own wish) is greater than the grace (which showered to the self as the result of its *pāratantriya* (who is at the disposal of the wish of the devotee) (SVB,152).³⁴

Generally, in the *upāya* the acceptance of the God by the self or *vice versa* could be identified as *paragatasvīkāra* (the grace in response to *prapatti*) and *svagatasvīkāra* (the acceptance of the self by the Lord). In the first case, the Lord may deny salvation to the devotee out of His independent authority but in the second, since the Lord Himself offers His grace to the devotee, his final redemption is certain. So, it is inferred that, instead of *paragatasvīkāra* of the self, *svagatasvīkāra* of the Lord to shower His grace upon the individual is greatly acknowledged. The fact is confirmed by the *Upanisadic* lines:

The above said *paramātman* is not one to reach by various means of *manas*, *buddhi*, *upāsana* and enquiry, etc. The same *paramātman* is reached by one who is liked by the Lord Himself. He exposed His true nature, etc., to him only (*Katakavalli Upanisad*, 2:43 & *Muntaka Upanisad*, 3:2:37).³⁵

His grace is autonomous and can be showered upon anybody He wishes. So, in *prapatti* the Lord is the agent and He alone stands as an instrumental cause to the *upāya* where the essence of the self is dissolved within the Divine qualities through its acceptance of His protection.

Obviously, God's grace is for all. Then the assessment of *prapatti* raises certain doubts, that (i) why do selected selves alone express their acceptance of the Lord to their protection (ii) why does not the Lord, out of his grace, make all the selves express their acceptance of Him, (iii) why is there a problem in *sarvamukti* (liberation for all) because if God's grace is generous, everybody would have the right to attain liberation. In response to these questions, PL and MM mention the Lord's autonomy, where they state that whom the Lord chooses, when he chooses for liberation strictly depends upon His eternal will (Mummu, 1983:151-2). So, the devotee with firm faith and aspiration should constantly follow the *upāya* with its prescribed norms where God knows its value and He, by considering the law of *karma* and the spiritual maturity of the aspirant, decides upon his salvation.

III

To recount, *prapatti* is a device open to the self so as to encourage mental peace and confidence upon the Lord. If an individual practices the *upāya* by nullifying egoistic tendencies, he could become *sthithaprajña* (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 2:52-72) (man of steadfastness) whose mental balance could not be disturbed by the opposites of success or failure, good or bad, etc. If he acquires it, he will discharge his regular duties without attachment towards its fruits (*niṣkāmakarma*) and through which by surpassing the odds of life, he would achieve the goal.

Thus, the above discussion and criticism upon the question of *prapatti* give hope to individuals. In *prapatti* he could acquire positive attributes through which his cognitive, conative and affective domains were fulfilled; by giving importance to the Lord, by abrogating the impact of worldly affairs, he could attain mental equipoise, i.e., the *summum-bonum* of the psycho-physical categories within which the realization upon divinity deepens, where the self loses its individuality and merges with the divinity as the part without loses its identity within the whole. Through spiritual union, the self enjoys ecstasy along with God. Besides, the *upāya* is not an instrument on the part of the self but an incidental effort i.e., the by-product of the Lord's grace and the self's God-given sentience. So, *prapatti* is natural, copes with the self's subservience and dependency upon the Lord; where the devotee avoids self-effort and wins the Lord's grace. Thus, PL explains the naturalness of *prapatti* by saying that, 'The Śeṣī's feet is the refuge (*turāi*) where the śeṣas descend, like a child placing his mouth on the breast (of his mother)' (*Mumukṣuppaṭi*. 147).³⁶ The truth needs no explanation. Thus he glorifies the *upāya* as: 'Therefore, it is pleasurable' (*SVB.147*).³⁷

Yes, in practice *prapatti* is self-evident and self-explanatory because it is the supreme value and without it life would become empty and worthless, where God takes care of the devotee, the destination becomes the path and the entire universe becomes one single solitary resort.

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NOTES

1. Śrīvaiṣṇavism accepts the philosophy of *viśiṣṭadvaita*. Within it, the system gives much importance to Śrī (Goddess Lakṣmi), the consort of Lord Nārāyaṇa. It originates from the theology and metaphysics of *Nālāyirādivyaprabhandam* (the four thousand auspicious hymns), composed by 12 Ālvārs, the Tamil saints of south India, between 3rd and 9th centuries. (Pōykaiaḷvār, Pūtattālvār, Peyālvār, Tīrumalīcaiālvār, Nammālvār, Maturakaviālvār, Kulacekarālvār, Pēriyālvār, Āṇṭāl, Tōṅṭarāṭipōṭiālvār, Tirupanālvār, Tirumaṅkaiālvār.) Through the ages, eminent *ācāryas* have given commentaries upon *Nālāyirādivyaprabhandam*, the independent as well as the polemic works which strengthen Śrīvaiṣṇavism.
2. Śrīvaikuṅṭha to a Vaiṣṇavite is heaven (*sattīya lokam*), where the Lord Nārāyaṇ, with His consort Śrī Lakṣmi, resides in yogic slumber in a reclining posture upon *Ādiśeṣa* (the thousand faced serpent). The allegorical assumption of Śrīvaikuṅṭha represents the supreme state of *mukti* by Śrīvaiṣṇavites where the selves, after their release reached, and enjoyed the bliss by seeing Śrīman Nārāyaṇa and merging with His countless spiritual qualities.

3. Piḷḷai Lokācārya (A.D.1205-1311) was the son of Veṭakkuttiruvīppillai (A.D.1167-1264) and a student of Nampillai (A.D.1147-1252).
4. Through the development of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, during the 14th century, the followers of Śrī Rāmānuja (d. A.D.1137) started to write *maṇiṭṭravāla* commentaries in Sanskritised Tamil upon *Nālāyiradivyaṭṭrabhandam*. Over a period of time, depending upon the importance they gave to either Tamil or Sanskrit in their commentaries, two antagonistic divisions of commentators, the Śrīraṅgam *ācāryas* or Tēṅkalai sect and the Kāñchīpuram *ācāryas* or Vaṭakalai sect originated. The former gave much importance to the devotional aspects of faith, while the latter disagreed and emphasized philosophical concepts with reasons. Against this background, because of his erudite scholarship and services rendered to his community, PL is considered to be the founder of the Tēṅkalai sect and his work, *Aṣṭādaśa Rahasya*, stands as the basic canonical text for them.
5. *Aṣṭādaśa Rahasya* includes the independent treatises of *Taṇiṭṭpiravaṇam*, *Taṇiṭṭuvayam*, *Taṇiccaramam*, *Yātruccikkappāṭi*, *Parantapaṭi*, *Śrīya:paṭiṭṭi*, *Mumukṣuppaṭi*, *Tattvattirayam*, *Artapañcakam*, *Tattuvacekaram*, *Pirapanna-paritrāṇam*, *Navavitacampantam*, *Navarattinamālai*, *Cāraṇakirakam*, *Pirameyacekaram*, *Camcāracāmrāraṇam*, *Arccirāṭikati* and *SVB*.
6. MM (A.D. 1370-1433) was a follower of the PL tradition and a student of Tiruvaymolipillai (A.D. 1307-1410). He was the last *ācārya* of the Tēṅkalai tradition and his works are *Etirājavimcati*, *Śrītevarājamaṅgalam*, *Upatecarattinamālai*, *Tiruvāymōḷiṇiṇṇāntāi*, *Ārtiṭṭirapantam*, and the commentaries upon *Tattuvattirayam*, *Mumukṣuppaṭi* and *SVB*.
7. *svayatna nīvirutti pāratantiriyāpalam; svappirayojana nīvirutti śeṣatvaṭṭalam.*
8. *prāpakāntaram aṅṅarkku upāyam.*
9. *jñānikalukku apāyam.*
10. Nammālvār was one of the Ālvārs who composed the works, i.e. *Tiruviruttam*, *Tiruvācīriyam*, *Pēriya Tiruvāntāi* and *Tiruvāymōḷi* of *Nālāyiradivyaṭṭrabhandam*. His works are highly commendable in the philosophy and theology of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.
11. *vartate me mahatpayam' eṅkaiyāle payajanakam; 'māsucaḥ' eṅkaiyāle cokajanakam.*
12. *tirukkuruṅkaiṭṭirāṇ piḷḷāṅ paṅikkumpāṭi:- matirā pintu micramāṇa cātakumpamaya kumpakata tirtacalilam pole ahāṅkāramicramāṇa upāyāntaram.*
13. *irattinattirkup palakarai poleym irāṅṅyattukku elumiccampaḷam poleym palattukkuc catrucam aṅṅru.*
14. *tāṅ tarittiraṅkāiyāle taṅakkuk koṭṭukkalāvatu oṅṅrillai.*
15. *kṣīpram bhavati dharmātmā śāśvacchāntim nigacchati kaunteya pratijānāhi na me bhataḥ praṇaśyati.*
Swiftly does he become a soul of righteousness and obtain lasting peace.
O son of Kunti (Arjuna)! Know thou for certain that my devotee perishes never.
16. *avaṅ tantataik kotukumiṭṭattil aṭaivile koṭṭukkil anupāyamām; aṭaivuketaḥ koṭṭukkil kaḷavu veliṭṭaḷum*
17. *irājamakentiraṅ eṅṅum āparaṅṅattai oṅṅvarum ariyāṭapaṭi kaḷavukaṅṅu olattile koṭṭukkumāru poleyāḷum*
18. *partru pokattai vayiru vaḷarṅkaikku uṅṅuppakkuma pole iruvarkkum avatyam.*
19. *ataṅṅku aṭi campantam.*
20. *'vedāntaikaḷ upāyamaha vitikkirapaṭi eṅ?' eṅṅil ausata cevai paṅṅṅātavarakaḷukku apimataṅṅastukaḷile attaiḷ kalaciṅṅiṅṅuṅṅararaiṅṅpole, iṅṅvaranaik kalantu vitikkiravittāṅṅai.*
21. *ātmayāṭātmiya jñānakāriyamākaiyāle svarūṅṅpattiruku uṅṅitamāy 'citra venṅa' eṅṅkizapaṭiye nīvirutti cāṅṅyamākaiyāle cukarūṅṅpamāy irukkum*

